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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HILLAH 000132

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SUBJECT: SOUTH-CENTRAL IRAQ FEDERAL REGION: A DONE DEAL

HILLAH 00000132 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Alfred Fonteneau, Regional Coordinator, REO Al Hillah, Dept of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On August 14 Regional Embassy Office (REO), Al-Hillah staff met with the head of Wasit Badr Corps and Provincial Council member Qasim Mohammad Jalal to discuss pressing issues of the province and region. The meeting proved to be fruitful when Jalal presented new information in regards to the looming issue of federalism. Jalal outlined both a time frame and the manner in which a federalist state in south-central Iraq would come into being. Jalal asserted that the Iraqi Council of Representatives (COR) would address and move forward with a federalism draft law by the end of September. According to Jalal, this aggressive, accelerated time frame is driven out of the fear that SCIRI may lose the majority rule of the Provincial Councils in south-central Iraq come next provincial elections and that such an outcome could spell doom for the proposed south-central federal region. Working at the grass roots level, he indicated that Badr has been applying pressure on those parties and entities opposed to a federalist solution. He went on to suggest that these two moves would culminate in the establishment of a nine province south-central Iraq Federal Region shortly after the end of September. End Summary.

¶2. (C) After a long hiatus from Wasit Province, REO Al-Hillah staff had the opportunity to return, on August 14, and meet with the head of Wasit Badr Corps and Provincial Council member Qasim Mohammad Jalal. Comment: Jalal is seen as a young, clever up-and-comer in Badr Corps with extensive connections in the Dawa Party. Often cooperative and frank, when Jalal speaks it is generally regarded that he is speaking for the Badr collective. Accordingly, as a senior representative to the militant arm of SCIRI he ostensibly projects SCIRI's intentions as well. End Comment. While the meeting was brief, Jalal was able to illuminate Badr's position on the issue of federalism with great clarity.

¶3. (C) REO staff inquired about the likelihood of a federalist solution to which Jalal plainly responded, "The south-central Iraq Federal Region is a done deal." He indicated that while a final vision for a federal province in south-central has yet to be agreed upon the overall concept of a federal region for south-central was widely accepted by Shiites and Kurds throughout the country. One major detail had apparently been resolved though, according to Jalal, the Merjiyah had concluded that there should be a singular south-central federal region comprised of nine provinces and not two or three smaller federal regions in south-central Iraq as some had been advocating. He went on to add that this "super" federal region would be located within a unified Iraq and that Baghdad would be a federal region

unto itself.

¶4. (C) "Shiite leaders consider that they have accomplished nothing after the liberation without achieving the federal state," according to Jalal. As such, Badr had been given clear instructions from SCIRI leader, Abdel Aziz Al Hakim, to mobilize efforts and people to advocate the necessity and importance of establishing the nine-province state. Jalal went on to say that Badr had begun applying pressure to those who opposed a federalist solution. Jalal noted that the Sadrists and the Fadheela Party remain the primary opponents to federalism and by extension the Provincial Councils of Basrah and Missan, as the Sadrists and Fadheela control the voting majority on the Provincial Councils of these two provinces. Minus the Sadrists and the Fadheela Party, the remaining United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) members support federalism, according to Jalal. Jalal indicated that Badr had already begun massive grass-roots initiatives in an effort to pressure these two parties through their base. As SCIRI holds the majority rule in seven of the nine Provincial Councils in south-central Iraq, pressure would be applied singularly to the provinces of Basrah and Missan. Jalal said that within both provinces Abdel Aziz Al Hakim and his son have been meeting regularly with community and religious leaders for the purpose of advancing their federalist vision. Ultimately, Jalal was dismissive of Basrah and Missan's efforts to fight federalism and noted, "We did not need the support of the two provinces to see a federal state realized as we (SCIRI) hold the majority vote in the Iraqi Council of Representatives."

¶5. (C) When pressed on a possible time frame for the realization of a south-central federal state, Jalal stated that the COR will discuss the draft law for a federal system come September. He went on to add that a resolution would be passed shortly thereafter, as the Kurds were in full support of any such resolution. With the full support of SCIRI, the Kurds, a significant portion of UIA's voting block and seven of the nine Provincial Councils of south-central Iraq, Jalal suggested that

HILLAH 00000132 002.2 OF 002

passing a federalism resolution through the COR would be a matter of course. When REO staff inquired further on the apparent hasty manner in which Badr is handling this critical matter, Jalal admitted that Badr is pressing for the quick passage of a resolution primarily because of the real possibility, come next provincial elections, that SCIRI may not be able to retain control of the critical seven south-central Provincial Councils set to be included in the proposed federal region.

¶6. (C) Comment: Perhaps most startling was the admission that SCIRI may in fact lose governing authority in several provinces in south-central Iraq. Such a frank admission suggests that SCIRI may be losing favor among the masses and the Sadrists and Fadheela Party may be in a position to gain from this disfavor. As such, Badr is courting the Sadrists and the Fadheela Party's base in the event that their time line for a final federalist resolution falls through. Further, Jalal appears to be suggesting that if SCIRI were to lose the majority rule of some or all of the seven south-central Provincial Councils, currently under its charge, the political landscape would be altered in such a way that the SCIRI vision of a nine province south-central federal state be squashed in its infancy. Though Jalal paints a somewhat overly optimistic picture of how federalism will spring forth within the coming months, the fact remains that SCIRI and its federalism allies have the legislative muscle to squeeze a federalism resolution out of the COR in the time frame Jalal put forth, particularly if their efforts are not countered by significant popular or political opposition. End Comment.  
FONTENEAU